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# **I Love My Team! Factors Leading to a Relationship with a Sports Team.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

What makes people connect with a particular sports team? Sports marketing research typically focuses on the sport specific elements of loyalty (geography, family history, social interactions), and general marketing research also considers the emotional component. Going a step further, and examining the factors within the larger relationship context could improve our understanding of why people connect with certain sports teams. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the impact of specific factors (socialization, proximity, attitude toward the team, and self-image congruence) on the initiation of a relationship with a sports team – which includes both the (1) development of an emotional connection and (2) intentions of continuing behaviors that are consistent with an enduring relationship. By including relationship intentions, this conceptualization goes beyond mere team loyalty.

Before a relationship can grow and strengthen, it has to be formed. The results of this study extend existing research, and can be used to guide sports marketers in developing appropriate methods of finding and connecting with individuals who would be more likely to engage in a long-term relationship. Having these lifelong fans could help drive ticket and merchandise sales, and increase positive word of mouth behavior. In addition, it would create a more stable fan base that makes it easier for sports franchises to maintain profitability through losing seasons.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Carly Odom is currently a senior honors marketing student. Upon graduation in May 2017, she plans to either pursue a graduate degree or enter into a career in the field of sports marketing.

Jamye Foster is an Associate Professor of Marketing. Her research interests are primarily in the areas of brand communications, relationship marketing, and retailing.

Melanie Bruce is an Assistant Professor of Marketing. Her research interests are in the areas of identity and consumption, social media, consumer behavior and simulation pedagogy.